

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

In the present Office action, claims 1-14 were examined. Claims 1-14 were rejected. By this amendment, claim 15 has been added. Claims 1-14 have been amended. No new matter has been added. Claims 1-14 are now believed to be in condition for allowance.

Claim Objection

The Examiner objected to claim 12 as being in improper form because a multiple dependent claim cannot depend on two claims such as claim 10 and claim 12 as set forth in claim 12. Claim 12 has been amended herein to address the Examiner's grounds for objection. Specifically, claim 12 has been split into two claims, claim 12 and claim 15. Claim 12 as amended and additional claim 15 now recite the central elements of original claim 12 absent the multiple dependencies. As a result of this amendment and addition, Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner's grounds for objection.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. 112

The Examiner rejected claims 1-14 as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter of the present invention. Specifically, the Examiner noted the inclusion of the language "or the like" in claim 1. In addition, the Examiner noted the use of the term "preferably" in claim 1. As amended herein, all of the claims containing the aforementioned offensive phrases have been amended to remove such language.

In addition, the Examiner rejected claim 2 as it is unclear how the support portion could have a portion which is double-T-shaped. Applicants respectfully submit that the confusion in

claim 2 arises from an imperfect translation. Specifically, the word "profile" should more correctly read "cross section" as shown in the figures. Claim 2 has been amended to now include the phrase "cross section". Applicants therefore believe that it is now clear that claim 2 recites a support portion having a cross section which at least in a portion-wise manner is of a double-T-shaped configuration. As a result of these amendments, Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner's grounds for rejection. Applicants therefore believe that claims 1-14 to be in condition for allowance.

Claim Rejections under 35 U.S.C. 102

The Examiner rejected claims 1-7 and 14 as being anticipated by Kirschner (U.S. 5,145,132). The Examiner notes that Kirschner teaches all of the recited elements of claims 1-7 and 14. Elsewhere the Examiner rejects claims 1, 8 and 10-12 as being anticipated by Johnson, Jr. et al. (U.S. 5,709,057). The Examiner likewise notes that Johnson, Jr. et al. teaches all of the elements of claims 1-8 and 10-12.

In response to the Examiner's grounds for rejection, Applicants have amended claim 1. Specifically, Applicants have added language to claim 1 reciting "... wherein the coupling element has a pivot portion fitted thereto and connected to a counterpart fork coupling element which is adapted for connecting to a bracing tube". A counterpart fork coupling element is a central element of the present invention and is clearly denoted in Figure 6. None of the art cited by the Examiner teaches the central element of the present invention. Therefore, Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner's grounds for rejection. Applicants therefore believe claim 1 to be in condition for allowance. As all of claims 2-14 are dependent upon claim 1, claim 1 now

believed to be in condition for allowance, claims 2-14 are likewise believed to be in condition for allowance.

Claim Rejections under 35 U.S.C. 103

The Examiner rejected claim 9 as being unpatentable over Johnson, Jr. et al. in view of Japanese Patent No. JP406010450A to Hashiguchi. For the reasons recited above with respect to the amendment to claim 1, wherein there has been added the counterpart fork coupling element, Applicants likewise traverse the Examiner's grounds for rejection with respect to claim 9.

Specifically, neither Johnson, Jr. et al. nor Hashiguchi teach or suggest, alone or in combination, a counterpart fork coupling element as does claim 1 of the present invention as amended herein.

As claim 9 is dependent upon claim 1, claim 1 now believed to be in condition for allowance, claim 9 is likewise believed to be in condition for allowance.

An earnest and thorough attempt has been made by the undersigned to resolve the outstanding issues in this case and place same in condition for allowance. If the Examiner has any questions or feels that a telephone or personal interview would be helpful in resolving any outstanding issues which remain in this application after consideration of this amendment, the Examiner is courteously invited to telephone the undersigned and the same would be gratefully appreciated.

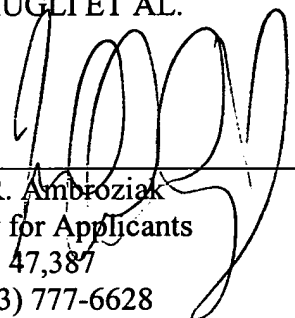
It is submitted that the claims as amended herein patentably define over the art relied on by the Examiner and early allowance of same is courteously solicited.

Applicants enclose herewith a check in the amount of \$110.00 to cover the fee for filing a one (1) month extension of time request.

If any additional fees are required in connection with this case, it is respectfully requested that they be charged to Deposit Account No. 02-0184.

Respectfully submitted,

RETO HUGLI ET AL.

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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service with sufficient postage as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: "Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313" on September 22, 2003.


Antoinette Sullo